

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

8th March 2026 (anticipated for 11th June 2026 meeting)

Member's Item – Councillor David Field

Topic: Bus Services in Medway

Public Transport in Medway is predominantly served by bus services and train services. The current bus network is a predominantly radial network centred on Chatham and over 90% of the network is provided by Arriva, with ASD, Chalkwell and Nu-Venture also providing services.

Medway introduced its current Bus Service Improvement Plan in June 2024. The aim of this plan is to see bus patronage increase from 7.7 million bus journeys in 2023/24 to 9 million bus journeys by 2029/30 (however this should be noted as being a return to patronage levels between 2007 and 2014).

Medway has a lower rate of bus trips per head compared to Kent and South East England as a whole – which given our urban geography should be seen as an underachievement. Bus journeys per population¹ in 2025 was reported as 25.1 journeys per head of population in Medway compared to 27.4 in Kent (excluding Medway), 33.2 across South East England, 62.4 across England and 200 in London.

To help achieve the aims of the this the Local Authority Bus Grant from the Department for Transport is providing £5.3m in revenue funding 2026 to 2029 and £10m in Capital funding 2026 to 2030. This is the first time that a three-year funding envelope has been provided to Medway Council, on a needs-based assessment as opposed to a competitive process.

Bus Services in Medway are deregulated, meaning that the provision and service levels are decided by private companies. Bus services were never deregulated in London, and several areas across the country are looking to follow Greater Manchester in reregulating bus services to enable future bus passenger growth through increased frequencies, more affordable fares and investment in new environmentally friendly and accessible bus fleets.

Medway has operated an Enhanced Partnership with bus operators since 2022 to improve local services and deliver its Bus Service Improvement Plan.

The Bus Services Act was passed in October 2025 with the purpose to protect and extend bus services. This will also provide local authorities, particularly areas outside mayoral authorities, more flexibility to consider franchising. In Kent there is already some limited franchising with the Fastrack bus networks centred around North West

¹ DfT BUS01f

Kent (particularly focussed on connecting new housing around Ebbsfleet Valley and Bluewater with Dartford and Gravesend) and Dover.

For many residents in Medway there are concerns regarding the service quality of bus services in Medway with communications in times of disruption, journey time reliability, poor frequencies (particularly in evenings and weekends), and poor connectivity between areas outside Chatham often raised as concerns. This was noted in the consultation report prepared by SYSTRA as part of the current Local Transport Plan².

Young people in Medway in particular note a lack of connectivity in evenings and weekends, particularly if they live in suburban and semi-rural Medway. Given the cost of driving lessons and 20 week waits for driving tests there is a clear opportunity to promote bus travel for young people, however it feels this opportunity is not being grasped.

The cost of bus fares in Medway was traditionally an area of concern; however, the national £3 single cap is in operation for Arriva and Chalkwell services, but not ASD or Nu-Venture services although currently there is no multi-operator ticketing in place. Medway has also seen a lack of investment in new buses with operators preferring to use mid-life buses, with less than 20% of Euro VI standards³ according to 2024 BSIP.

Medway Council is currently refreshing the Local Transport Plan as well going through public examination for the Local Plan. Both plans will require a significant step change in the use of bus services to reduce the impacts of congestion and provide capacity for new sustainable development. Potential policy proposals such as Bus Franchising and Bus Rapid Transit will likely be explored to enable the required increase in public transport usage.

Session Objectives

- Understand the current role of Bus Services in Medway and what potential there is for growth. This includes opportunities for supporting new housing, social and economic regeneration, public health and air quality improvements.
- To understand the challenges and opportunities to address the issue of low market growth in Medway and how services could be supported to stimulate economic growth and social cohesion across Medway.
- To understand the key needs and challenges for Medway Bus Users
- To note the progress of the Bus Services Improvement Plan in achieving its aims
- To understand the challenges that Bus Operators have in operating service in Medway

The session would also seek to influence the development of the updated Local Transport Plan

² <https://democracy.medway.gov.uk/mgconvert2pdf.aspx?id=84487>

³ Medway Council BSIP (2024)

Members of the committee will also see to address the issues and concerns of Medway residents, and the council will seek to encourage public participation through its communication and social media channels ahead of the session.

As part of this discussion the following external invitees should be invited to attend the meeting where this Member's Item will be discussed:

- Martijn Gilbert, Arriva Buses UK MD
- Norman Kemp, Nu Venture MD
- Hardip Dosanjh, ASD Transport Director
- Roland Eglinton, Chalkwell MD
- Sean Spillane, Save our Buses
- Becky Miller, Director for England, Bus Users UK

It would be expected that the Cabinet members for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration and Community Safety, Highways and Enforcement would both attend this session.